

Peabody Enterprise

1912-1937

Twenty-fifth Anniversary Number

Section III

THE STORY OF PEABODY'S LEATHER INDUSTRY

THE CITY OF PEABODY is widely known throughout the universe, including Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, Central America, in fact, in every known part of civilization, as, "PEABODY THE LEATHER CITY." Some business concerns and manufacturers term it, "PEABODY THE TANNERY TOWN." Both terms are synonymous and apparently significant of the leather manufacturing industry.

COLONIAL TIMES

The early period of the tanning industry of Peabody dates back to Colonial times, when this city, at that time a town, was part of Danvers and also formed part of Salem. It was nearly a century ago that Philemon Dickerson was granted land, "to make tan pits and dress goatskins and hides," that business obtained a foothold here. Dickerson laid out his little tanyard in the year 1639, doubtless the first in America.

The early tanners in Peabody, The Southwicks, Shoves, Suttons and Pooles, started tanning in a meagre way, along the brooks in the rear of Main street. The Osborns, Uptons, Poores, Littles and Jacobs, come with the business later, most of them locating on Foster street.

Nearly 225 years ago the tanning business commenced in this city and it has continued to thrive ever since, without distinct breaks. The old time tanners were staunch citizens, honorable and patriotic.

The revolutionary Lexington monument, was dedicated in memory of those brave minute men of 1775, and has names of some tanners inscribed, namely: Southwicks and Jacobs. This monument is situated at the corner of Main and Washington streets.

If the old tanners could revisit the scenes of their earthly operations, they would be amazed at the magnitude of the present day tanning industry, the many and diversified changes in every branch of this mammoth industry are a complete rejuvenation in a part century of tanning progress.

Tanning and currying became the staple industries and continued to flourish until leather made in Philadelphia became popular in the East.

In the middle of 1800, the sheepskins and morocco tanners assumed important positions.

In 1804, the introduction of steam boilers and splitting machines had a great effect on the leather business. The first of these enabled the tanners to warm their liquors and hasten the tedious process then in vogue. The splitting machine gave them the first opportunity to get a split from a hide.

At a later period a new generation of tanners appeared in business. The Osborns, Poores, and Jacobs, were still in the trade, but the Proctors, Elliots, Harris and others came to the front.

During the period of 1886 sheep leathers and morocco made rapid strides in the industry of leather.

Peabody possessed many natural advantages a quarter of a century back, in location, nearness to Boston, facilities for transportation, excellence and cheapness of its water for manufacturing purposes, in addition to its admirable library and excellent schools.

PERFECTION OF PRODUCT

During the last quarter of a century the leather industry has taken mammoth strides towards perfection of its product. Practically all machine operations of any nature are subject to individual motor control, which signifies maximum efficiency at a minimum cost of production. In the early days large driven belts controlled the operation of machine groups departmentally. Departments today in most factories are operated to a practical degree and the old and antiquated "rule of thumb method" is hardly recognized in this present business era.

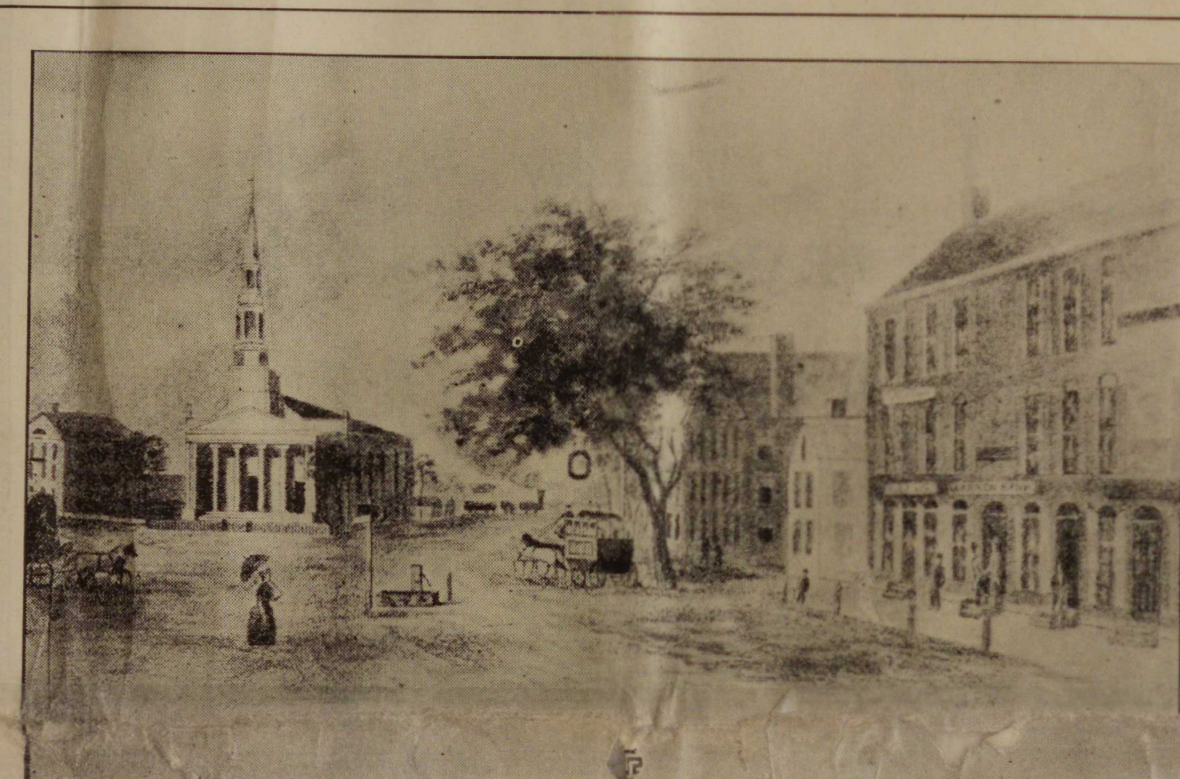
EARLY PROCEDURE

The process in the earlier period was of long duration, comparing procedure with present day methods. Hides were placed in tan vats and allowed to remain there for months. Considerable space was utilized in addition to a slow method of placing hides in their liquors and later extracting them with long tongs. In the later day period after elimination of this process to a greater degree at least and the change over policy of tanning, many hides were taken from these old vats in the original liquor as left at the time of their apparent completion, no evident harm occurring to the hides, except additional age and mature swelling and absolute curing taking place. This has been known to have occurred not only in the City of Peabody, but in other nearby cities as well. It is very evident that each vat did not have or at least contain a number noting the contents of each particular vat. In present day methods such oversights are practically nil, for the simple reason that each pack is properly listed as to content and in later processes is numbered, and as it passes through various department operations, is checked by foremen who in turn officially confer with the office staff, who likewise in turn put their stamp of approval on the product.

CHEMISTRY

Chemistry plays a very important part in the manufacture of leather. In the early days consulting chemists were called in periodically, or samples of different kinds of ingredients were forwarded to them for analysis, to determine the correct method of procedure, in various branches of the industry. These consulting

chemists in addition to receiving samples of the product whether to arrive at a definite formula to correspond to the immediate requirement, spent considerable time at the factories, carefully analyzing all methods leading up to their particular test. In beamhouse analyses great care was necessary on their part as well as in the tanning operation. The most difficult concern to these consulting chemists was and is today the matching of shades and colors in the colorhouse operations. To the mind of chemists this dye test operation for correct color or shade assemblage is one of the most difficult, in fact, one of the most important. According to their opinion, what makes it most difficult to arrive at correct shades or colors, is the necessary correct knowledge of all procedures up to and including that particular operation, such as the beamhouse, tanhouse, fatliquor and other essential operations, leading up to this test. Larger tanneries have their corps of chemists, who periodically make tests of all departmental operations, therefore keeping abreast daily of any change that may occur,



PEABODY SQUARE NINETY YEARS AGO

for beamhouse, tanhouse or colorhouse and making laboratory tests principally due to lower standard of ingredients, imparted through product purchase. Methods of this nature whereby a careful check is placed on all purchased products, minimize the possibility of loss and make for near standard procedure. In the smaller factories, in earlier days and some of present day, consulting chemists are only called in when trouble is evident. In cases such as these setbacks occur that sometimes take time to correct and spell money losses to the manufacturer.

SPECIALIZATION CHEMISTS

Today most all large plants have their own chemists properly trained to perform regularly certain kinds of work. This task is under the direct supervision of a master chemist who passes daily upon all quota of work. Some intermediary concerns consult today periodically, tanning process experts, as well as dye manufacturers, thereby obtaining first hand information of these houses, who employ expert chemists, in relation to tanning material changes and the assistance essential in establishing certain standard seasonal shades and colors. This method of procedure is only necessary among establishments not employing chemists, chiefly due to the size of the plant and the manufacturer. No overhead expense is attached to assistance rendered by these practical consulting chemists, specially sent out by manufacturers of a certain kind of product. As a rule compensation rendered is in the form of purchases of their tanning and dye products.

DRYING METHODS

Our present day drying methods are altogether different than in the old days, when the leather was dried over yard extension arms, in the open air subject to weather conditions and in dry lofts with shutters with open and closed attachments and in many other ways of an open air nature. Most of these antiquated methods were subject to weather conditions and little doubt remains in the minds of modern day tanners that such a system certainly retarded the progress of the product to a certain degree, but at the same time did not have a serious effect on the leather constituent part itself. It was in a strict sense of the word a slower process and costly but did not bring about any material loss in the manufactured product. Today, this particular method of drying is carried out in a much larger degree in leather establishments, whether it be sheep, goat, hide, calf or sole leather, by properly controlled enclosed driers, steam and moisture, temperature being determined by the kind of product in process of operation. In this particular operation, the time element is minimized to a great extent. In some of the intermediary manufacturing plants this drying method is carried out by the hanging of leather on hooks, steam being applied and electric fan appliances distributing the heat as near uniformly as is possible. This system is in vogue in many of the smaller plants and is carried out to a systematic degree. In the case of the enclosed driers the product is placed first on a

large frame, the leather being toggled on both sides of the frame, and run into the drier and allowed to remain in this properly controlled room under relative steam and moisture for a given time and then taken out and leather stripped from the dryer and forwarded to the next stage, which in most cases is the staking process.

SUEDE

Today there is on the market, in fact there has been for quite a few years back, a leather product finished on the flesh side, known as SUEDE, and this particular product is one of the outstanding products of this city. The last ten years especially, this product has taken rapid strides in the leather field and surely measures up to any of the other important leather manufactured outputs. The City of Peabody is in the front rank in the production of this fine article of Suede and the tanners interested in this product have devoted considerable time and expense in order that one of the finest manufactured processes might be passed on

to the general public, in a hundred different shades and colors, being also responsible for as many styles in both the shoes of men and women. The latter are solely responsible for the manufacturers keeping alert to keep abreast of the demand on the part of the women. Style shows are held periodically in various sections of the country at which time the leather and shoe men meet to display their products and agree on the predominating shades and colors for the approaching seasons. In this manner the general public is permitted to receive the benefit of mature and up to the minute shoe ideas.

SUEDE SPLITS

A split is realized from this Suede skin and is likewise largely sold in this country and abroad. The Suede split is made from calf and side leathers. The demand of late years has necessitated many colors other than black and brown, which predominate today, but of the former the black seems to hold front position. Due care is given to the treatment of splits in Suede. In Suede operations, buffing in the various stages has changed. Large machines are now being used to buff a fast rev, whereas formerly it was done by hand, up to all other standard products and takes it place with every modern and progressive style.

SHEEP AND GOAT

The Sheepskin industry is by no means secondary to any of the other manufactured leather products, ranking in first position with Calf, Hides, Goat and Sole leathers. The manufacturing of Sheepskins can be classified Goat leather, because the two come under practically one manufactured head. In the manufacture of sheep and goat, many and diversified are the product operations. Sheep and goat skins are utilized for innumerable purposes, such as book covers, shoes, slippers, bags, pocketbooks, coats, also embossed articles of every conceivable design. The greatest of care is necessary from this initial stage in pickle throughout the complete process of manufacture. The pickled skins are received in large casks, whereas tanned sheep and goat are received in large bales, sort of semi-tanned, arriving from India-Australia, Central and South America and other foreign ports. In the case of India goods, semi-tanned, it is necessary to dampen, shave, dry and proceed from this point on as in the procedure of pickled skins, so treated in manufacture, up to this stage in process. In addition to India tanned goods arriving from foreign ports, the same can be said of the pickled skin product. The better grades of skin come from sheep and goat raised on the hillsides and upper lands. The skin texture is much firmer and grades, generally speaking, better, from sheep and goat raised on hill and mountainsides, whereas those raised on the level land and in the valleys and warmer climates, produce a much different skin texture product, which has considerable to do with the purchase price of the product and also the grading and selling price of them on the market. As a matter of fact, the purchase price element is taken into consideration with reference to country, climate and general cattle raising territory having a bearing on the animal product. All available by-products realized from the India tanned goods as well as the pickled skin by-products are utilized or sold. The pickled skins are put through a press operation whereby the grease is extracted. Chemically this product is treated in order to extract oil and finer grease as well as fat-liquor properties. The next step is the tanning of the pickled skins. Other important operations are shaving, drying, seasoning, either by hand or by spraying machines, with apartments with spray gun attachments, containing the required color for finish on the leather. Selection is made for all kinds of colors and finishes, and while a great deal of this spray gun attachment work is carried on, at the same time considerable of this seasoning operation is done by hand, in all branches of the product, whether it be calf, sheep, goat, hide, or other kinds of leather. The desired manufactured product is then put on the market, after it has been properly measured for footage and graded for quality, which has to do with the price that the shoe manufacture can buy it for in the final stage.

EMBOSSING AND SNUFFING

The fine art of embossing is introduced either before or after the leather is seasoned, or treated by spray guns. Large presses are used to bring about the required pattern or design. This

(Continued on page 24)

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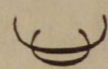
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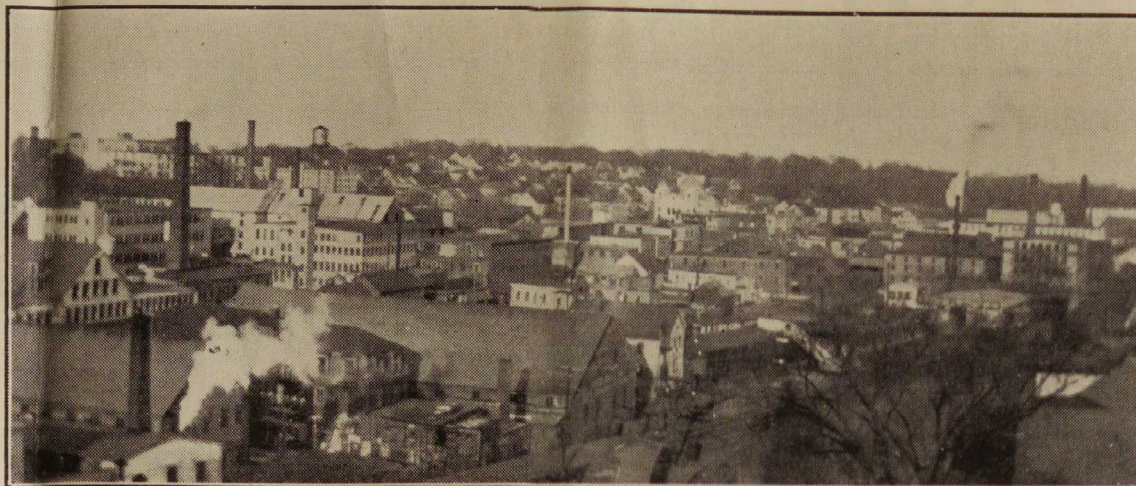
Kirstein Leather Co., Inc.



75 WALNUT STREET

Peabody, Mass.

ONE OF PEABODY'S INDUSTRIAL SECTIONS

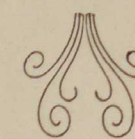


View of Peabody's biggest industrial section taken from the steeple of the South Congregational Church. In the picture some of the largest factories can be seen. The photo is of the Walnut Street section. Note the numerous smokestacks protruding high in the air.

Wm. Fromer Leather Co.

Dealer and Finisher of

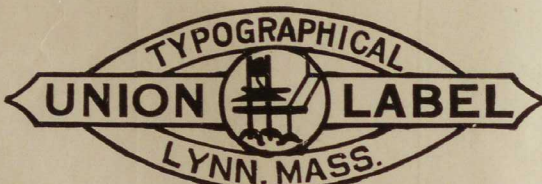
UPPER LEATHER



15 SPRING STREET

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Lynn Typographical Union, No. 120

Peabody
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Lowell Street

Cor. Chestnut

Eastman Gelatine Corp.

PEABODY, MASS.



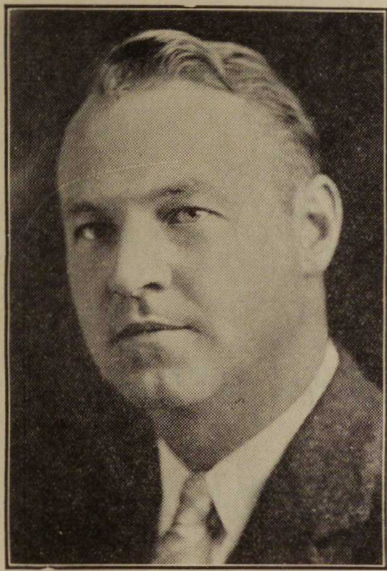
The T. J. O'Shea Leather Co.

SHEEPSKIN TANNERS

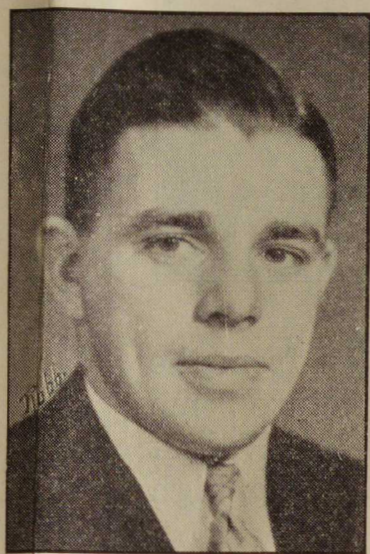
O'SHEA BUILDING

PEABODY, MASSACHUSETTS

PEABODY'S MUNICIPAL FAMILY--1937



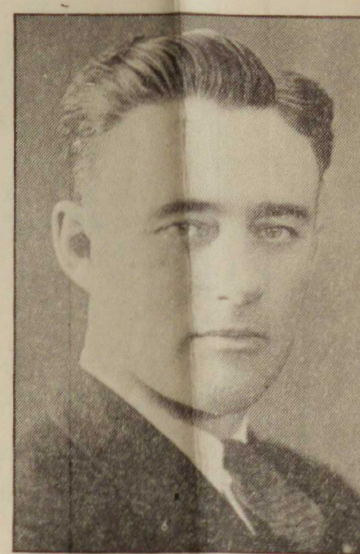
JOHN F. DRISLANE
Councillor-at-Large



THOMAS F. CULLEN
Councillor-at-Large



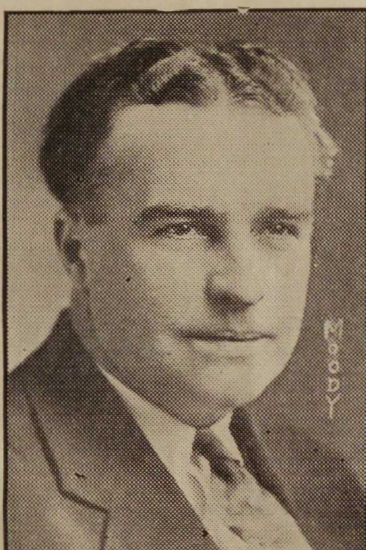
FRANCIS D. DONOVAN
Councillor-at-Large



DANIEL J. BOYLE
Councillor-at-Large



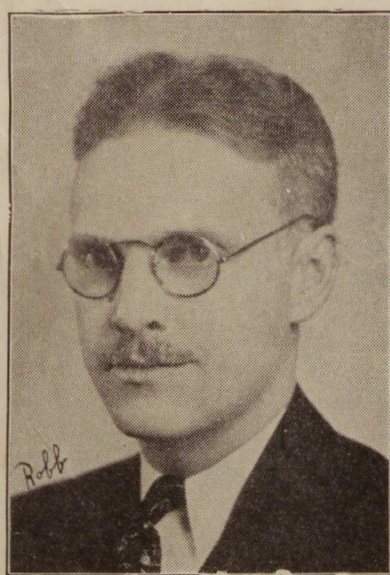
CORNELIUS W. CLANCEY
Councillor-at-Large



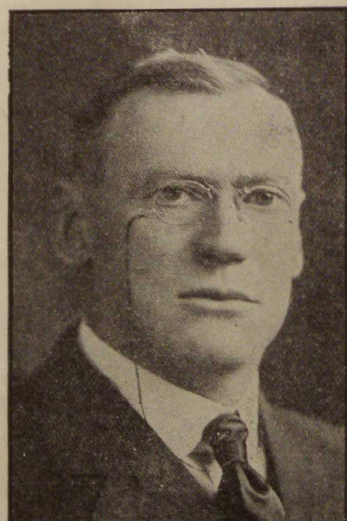
MARTIN P. DOYLE
Councillor Ward One



MAURICE P. HALLINAN
Councillor Ward Two



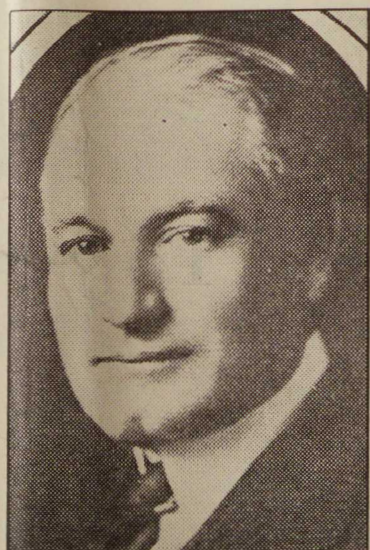
JOSEPH B. O'KEEFE
Councillor Ward Three



COL. JAMES J. RAY
Welfare Commissioner



HIS HONOR JAMES EDWARD McVANN
Mayor of Peabody



EDWARD J. DOWD
City Clerk



PATRICK M. CAHILL
City Treasurer



CHARLES V. CASSIDY
City Collector



JOSEPH F. LUZ
Councillor Ward Four
President of Council



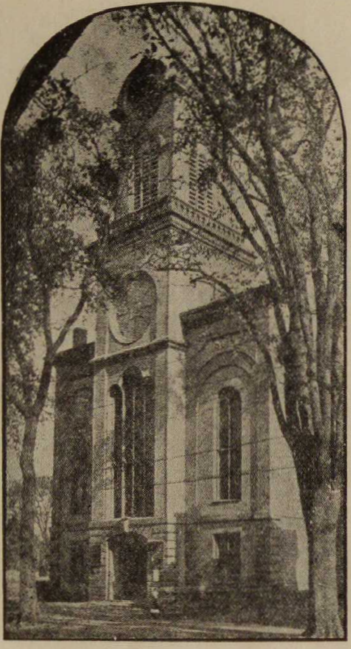
RALPH L. BLAKE
Councillor Ward Five



LAWRENCE T. LANE
Councillor Ward Six



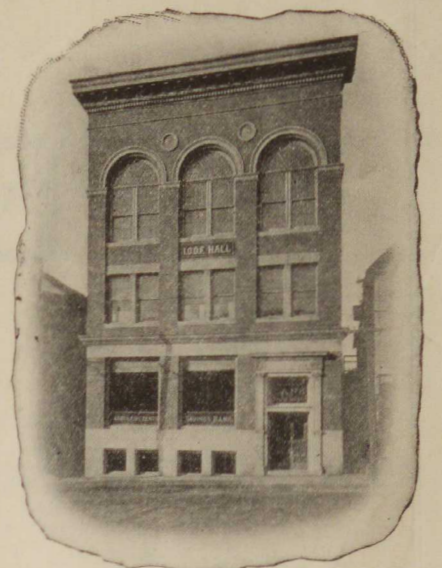
CHARLES A. MOGAVERO
Commissioner of Public Works



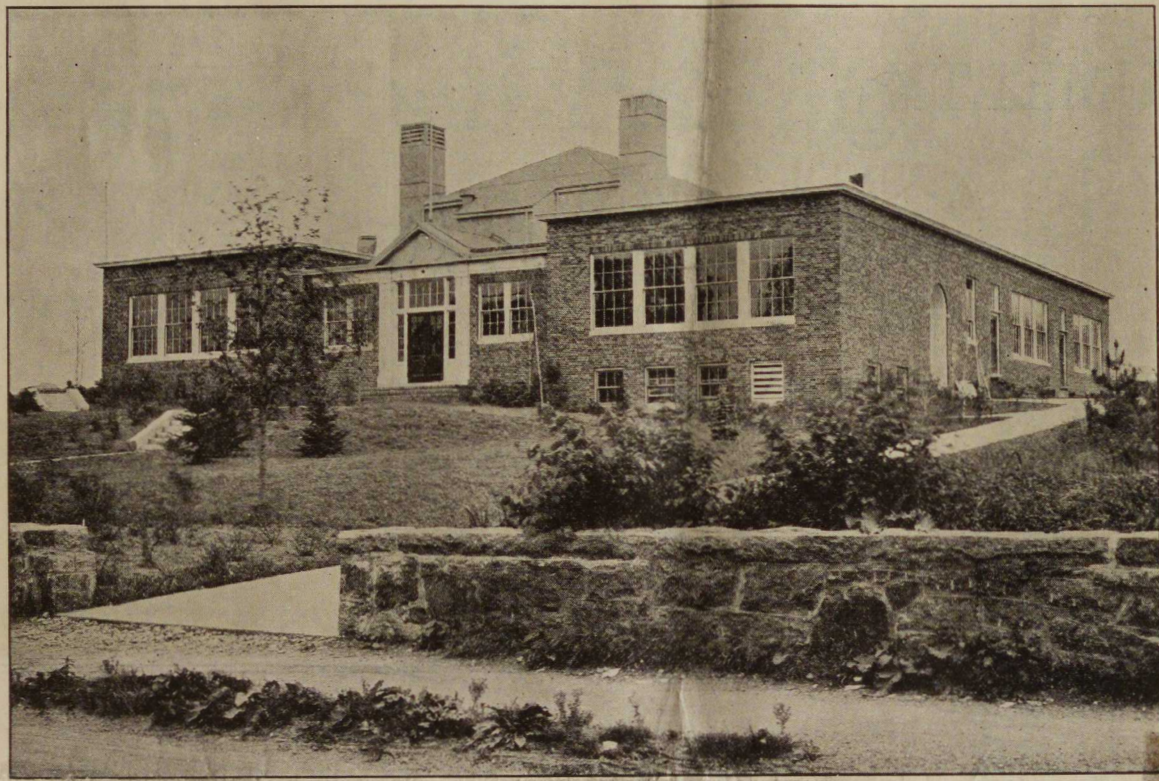
THE METHODIST CHURCH
BEFORE NEW STEEPLE
WAS ERECTED



THE THOMAS CARROLL SCHOOL



THE WARREN FIVE CENTS
SAVINGS BANK BEFORE
REMODELING



THE DANIEL FRANCIS KEEFE SCHOOL



CENTRAL FIRE STATION



THE THOMAS J. O'SHEA MANSION



WALLIS SCHOOL



THOMAS CARROLL SCHOOL ANNEX



ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

PEABODY ELECTRIC LIGHT DEPARTMENT

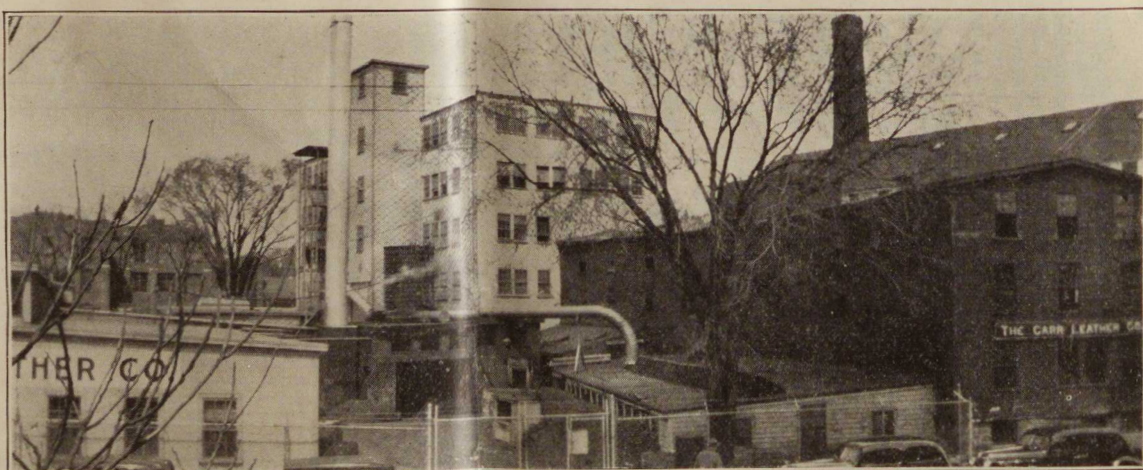
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PATRICK H. TUMELTY
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PEABODY SQUARE---FIFTEEN YEARS AGO



This picture, showing the O'Shea blocks on Peabody Square, was taken in 1922. Since that time there has been numerous changes on the square. The picture shows the Post Office, Alberghini's Store, and the J. W. Trask Market in the corner building. These have all either moved away or been changed. The trolley car that is coming up Foster Street will bring back many memories to Ward One people who used the line frequently.



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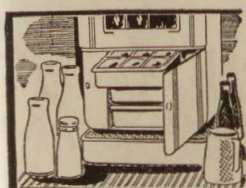


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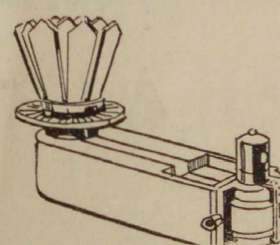


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A. Z. Malt Co.

104 Main Street

Peabody, Mass.

Ward Greenhouses



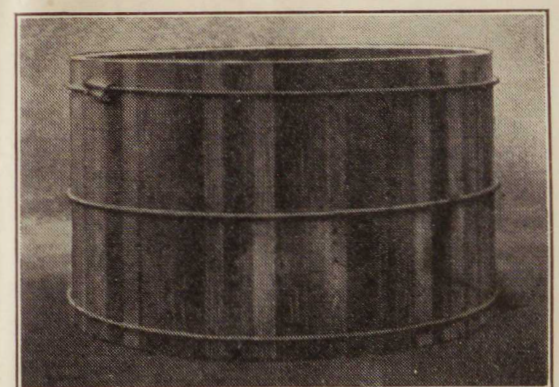
49 Warren Street Peabody, Mass.

SAWYER'S, Inc.

Dry Goods

68 Main Street Peabody, Mass.

Larrabee & Hingston



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TANNERS TANKS

PINWHEELS, ETC.



Telephone Peabody 1981

19 Howley Street
Peabody, Mass.

Peabody's Leather Industry

(Continued from page 17)

particular operation is very important and calls for expert experience as far as plates are concerned, also the proper temperature in addition to correct pressure so that a near-perfect job can be realized. This branch of the industry is not alone applied to sheep and goat, but calf, hide and other kinds of leather has taken on rapid strides of late years and is still in its infancy as far as research and advancement to a point of perfection is concerned. In embossing it is possible after snuffing off the grain on the leather to apparently remove an imperfect surface is brought about, to season the product and emboss same and place on the market one of the finest products for shoe purposes. The snuffing of the grain on what seems to be imperfect leather, but only on the surface, makes it possible to turn out a very fine piece of leather, both for men and women wear. This process is not a new one, but has been in vogue for some time. It has been very much improved on of late and to all appearances such snuffing of leather is hardly noticeable to an eye other than that of the trained leather or shoe man. It is in keeping with the turning out of a better grade of leather.

Patent Leather

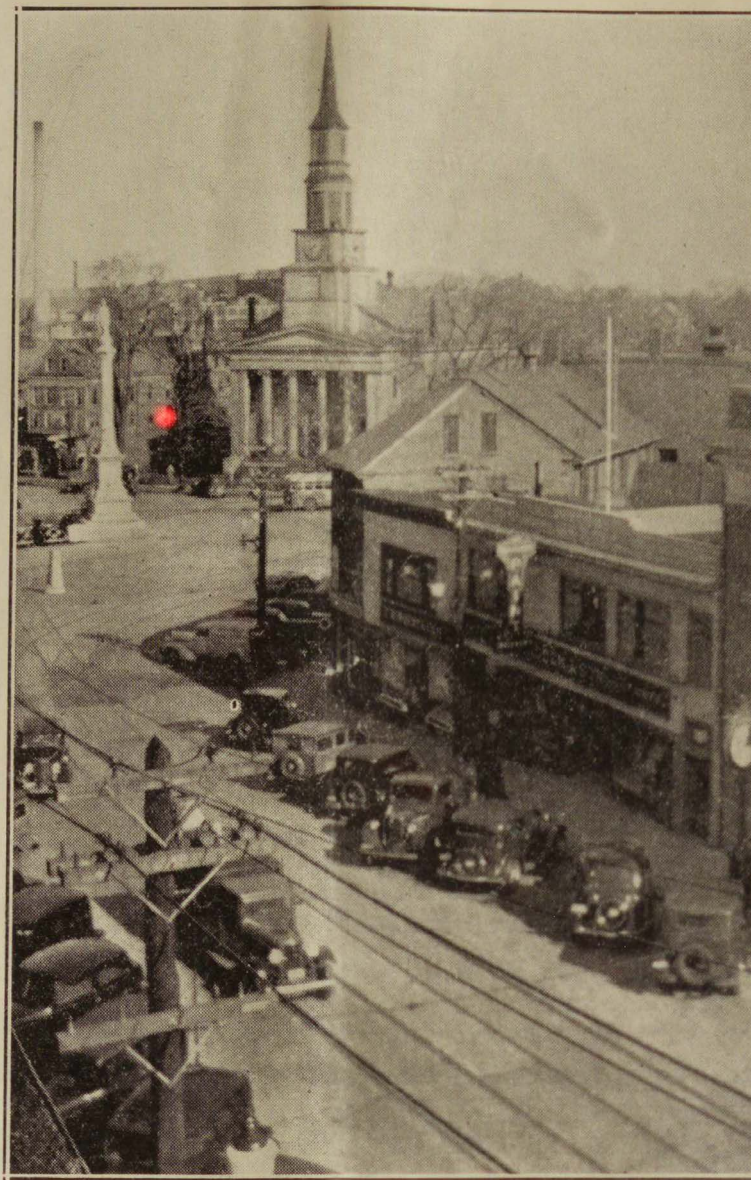
SOLARIZATION OF PRODUCT

Very little is left to weather conditions this present day in the drying of leather. In the sunning of patent leather, manufacturers are still subject to the curing condition and ultra violet-ray properties of the sun, in the curing and drying of the leather jappaned. Along these lines a special study is being made by men of varied and wide experience to correct the method of depending on the sun and wind elements, in the production of patent leather. Members of the staff of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, have been giving this subject very careful study along with the Turner Tanning Machinery Company of Peabody and the United Shoe Machinery Company of Beverly, in the invention of a Solarized machine, which will make possible the drying and proper curing of patent leather without the aid of the sun. Before many years have passed we look forward to the perfection of such a Solarized machine. This will not only save time in production, but will also be a big factor in saving large acreage space, now used solely for this drying purpose, leather being placed on frames and put out in the sunning yards.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Research is being carried out in a scientific manner that warrants the advanced progress of the leather industry of today. With the study and application of modern scientific methods,

PEABODY SQUARE TODAY



This picture was taken from the roof of the O'Shea block on Main Street. It gives an excellent view of the square showing the traffic beacon, the monument and the South Church steeple. Note the irregularity of rooftops and the bus entering the square.

phenomenal research changes are taking place yearly. This particular branch of study is really in its infancy, as far as the leather industry is concerned. It is a new innovation in the manufacture of leather and is being pushed forward by all leading leather men. The department of research is responsible today for the rapid strides that this industry is making in Peabody and all other live wire leather productive centers in the United States today. The scientific study of every operation that effects leather is very carefully scrutinized and thoroughly analyzed by men who have been properly trained in this branch of the work. A study is made of the mechanical, electrical and constructive parts of the business by this department. A scientific study is also made of the component parts of the process of manufacture and a close survey made by every manufacturing leather operation is made daily and same is confined to minute scrutiny by trained men.

BY-PRODUCTS

In the early days scraps and by-products of leather were thrown away or cast aside in dumps and in most cases dumped in rubbish piles, or perhaps used for filling in purposes. Today there is no waste in the manufacture of leather. Every component part is utilized for some specific purpose and sold to general dealers, who engage in this end of the scrap leather business. A remarkable saving has been brought about by purchasing this method of late years.

MODERN TRANSPORTATION

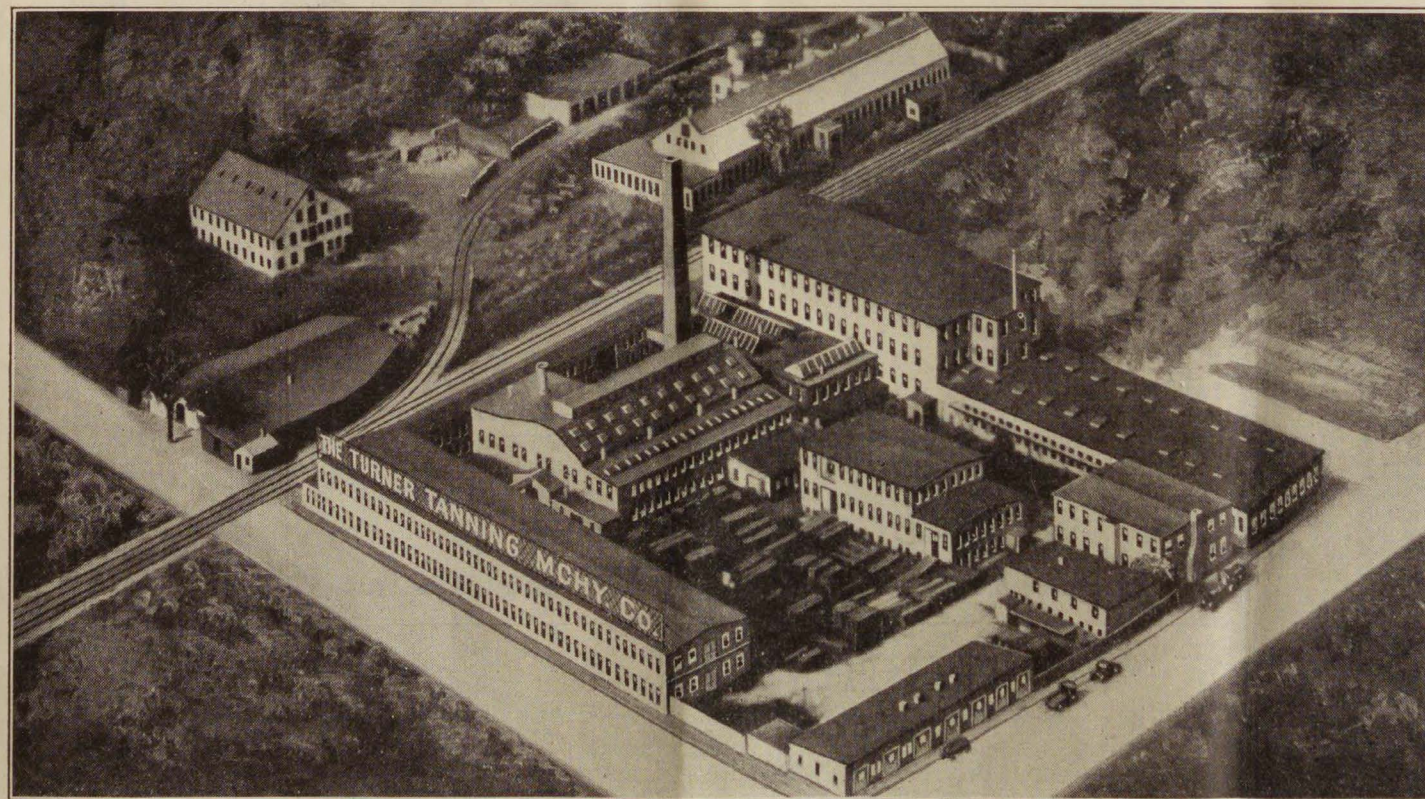
Our method of shipment and transportation has developed rapidly in the last quarter of a century. It has had a tendency to bring the shoe manufacturer in closer touch with the leather manufacturer. Truck transportation, highly motorized, has further developed a new and quicker method of delivery of the product and ingredients used in the process of manufacturing. Particularly is this evident in our local points, such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia and other shipping points nearby.

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

Today, in the leather industry, where competition is so keen and the demand so exact, in the administration of affairs, little red tape can be found in the prosecution of business. Our Peabody leather manufacturers are wide awake and progressive and ever on the alert to improve and better their manufactured leather product. Direct appeals are made to every branch in the industry for new and progressive suggestions of a practical and workable nature. The manufacturers welcome such suggestions and if in keeping with a curtailment of cost or a better process in manufactured product, proper financial remuneration will be forthcoming on the part of the concern or company.

Peabody is the pioneer leather city and as time passes will continue to pave the way for future leather generations to come, in order that they may shoulder and carry on the accepted standards as set by the manufacturers of this present day.

Peabody's finished leather product output amounts to approximately \$35,000,000 to \$40,000,000 per year.



THE TURNER TANNING MACHINERY CO.

*The largest and most complete line of Hide and Leather Working Machinery in the world.
All kinds of Machinery for all kinds of Leather. Also full line of Belt Making Machinery*

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